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Al Qaeda Recruits Children, Women for Terror Missions

By Fred W. Baker III
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6, 2008 – Al Qaeda is recruiting and training boys -- some younger than 11 -- to kidnap and kill, a senior U.S. military spokesman in Iraq said today.  [\(Video\)](#)



Five training tapes recovered in a December raid show as many as 20 boys, most thought to be younger than 11 years old, carrying automatic weapons and grenades, storming homes in mock kidnappings and assassinations, and sitting in a circle chanting their allegiance to al Qaeda. Portions of the tapes were aired for journalists at a news conference in Iraq today.

“Al Qaeda in Iraq wants to poison the next generation of Iraqis and hopes to continue the cycle of violence they have brought upon Iraq,” Multinational Force Iraq spokesman Navy Rear Adm. Gregory J. Smith said.

In the videos, with what appears to be a July 13, 2007, date stamp, the boys carry weapons, including pistols, machine guns and rocket-propelled-grenade launchers. Pictures show a

small boy in a checkered head scarf, carrying a pistol. Another boy with his face covered brandishes an automatic weapon.

As the children carry out training sessions, adults can sometimes be seen providing instructions from the background. In one scene, seven children with their heads and faces covered stop and capture an adult twice their size riding a bike. Another shows the children, again with their faces covered, scaling a courtyard wall, attacking a house and taking its occupants prisoner. Later, in what appears to be the same house, seven boys sit in a half-circle on the floor chanting and singing their allegiance to al Qaeda.

Smith said that this not the first such recovery of videos and photos showing al Qaeda training children, but that the “the volume and content was the most significant and disturbing we’ve found to date.”

Smith said the videos most likely were produced as training and recruiting films.

Forces also recovered in December a proposal to produce a film showing terrorists training children, Smith said. The script was to include children interrogating and executing victims, planting bombs and conducting sniper attacks, he said.

Al Qaeda often refers to children as the “new generation of the Mujahidin,” or warriors engaged in a jihad, he said. There are also reports of al Qaeda entering schools and distributing its propaganda. Thousands of al Qaeda-sponsored Web sites target children, Smith said.

Recently, two 15-year-old boys were used in suicide bombings in Iraq.

Al Qaeda also appears to be increasing the use of women as suicide bombers. Before 2007, only five women had reportedly carried out suicide attacks. In 2007 there were 10, and four such attacks already have taken place in 2008, Smith said.

The two women suicide bombers in last week’s deadly attack in Baghdad were mentally handicapped and likely were unwitting pawns in al Qaeda’s efforts to ramp up violence there, he said.

“The events in recent weeks further remind us of the morally depraved nature of Iraq’s enemy,” Smith said.

Smith contrasted al Qaeda’s motivation with that of Iraq’s government.

“Iraq’s democratic and elected government is building schools, training engineers, police officers and doctors, and offers the children of Iraq hope for a peaceful and prosperous future,” Smith said. “Al Qaeda Iraq, on the other hand, sends 15-year old boys and mentally handicapped women on suicide missions, builds car bombs and is trying to teach children how to kill.”

Iraqi Maj. Gen. Mohammad al Askari, a spokesman for Iraq’s Defense Ministry, also briefed reporters alongside Smith. He said there has been a recent trend by al Qaeda to kidnap children and hold them for ransom to fund their operations. He showed a video of a rescue of an 11-year-old boy who had been kidnapped. Al Qaeda had asked for \$100,000 for the boy’s return or, they said, he would be beheaded, Askari said.

Askari said that these acts showed the signs of desperation on the part of al Qaeda.

“Al Qaeda is losing not only his safe havens, but also his resources like funding. ... This could be the end of al Qaeda in Iraq,” he said.